

Pickpockets in ‘Tana: How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Don't have anything more in your wallet than you are willing to lose. Try to keep only what is essential with you: a piece of identification and no more than \$40-50 in local currency. Madagascar is a cash society. There is no need to always carry your ATM/credit card with you unless you need to make a transaction. Make a copy, front and back, of everything that you have in your wallet. In case something happens, you will have all the numbers and contact information to cancel your cards. Do not carry your passport with you unless you need it for travel. Instead, keep a copy with you.

Ladies, **only carry purses that zip.** Carry your purse tightly under your arm and slightly in front of you. If you have the backpack-type purse, swing it around so that it is slightly in front of you as well. Keep your purse where you can see it. Gents, put a **rubber band around your wallet and carry it in your front pocket.** This is going to make it extremely difficult for someone to get it out without you knowing.

Pickpockets actively observe their targets before striking. **Do not be a soft target.** If you walk through the streets talking your cell phone, push through crowds or interacts with street vendors, then you are easily distracted and thus, an easy target. By avoiding crowds, crossing the street or altering your path multiple times and looking over your shoulder and observing your environment, you will notice surveillance and reduce your chances of being a victim. Additionally, pickpockets will pick up on your behavior; quickly realize you are a hard target and move on to easier prey. Finally, at all cost avoid letting strangers (pedestrians, street children, vendors) touch you or make any type of physical contact.

Be Aware! The three most likely places to get pick pocketed are close to major tourist areas and hotels: Independence Avenue, Hotel Colbert area, and Avenue of the Palms. Pickpockets work in groups. They are often young street children, encouraged and trained by their parents to target visiting tourists. They can be groups of young girls or boys and teenagers.

If you are a victim, **don't chase down whoever you think stole your wallet.** Remember, pickpockets often work in groups. Your wallet was most likely handed off before you realized it was gone. If you chase down and grab who you think is the culprit and he/she doesn't have your wallet, you could cause a minor incident to escalate into a confrontation with an unknown and possibly dangerous suspect(s).

The two most common tactics pickpockets use are:

In the marketplace/street corners: You will be surrounded by several people all trying to move around you while you are walking. While someone brushes up or bumps up against you, his/her partner on the opposite side is picking your pocket.

On the street: The most frequently used tactic here is the distraction technique. Two or more people will approach you and ask for directions, try to sell you stuff, or just crowd you. Street children enjoy this technique. While you are occupied and distracted with one person, another is picking your pocket. Another technique is to have something thrown or spilled on you, like water or ice cream. Someone will approach you and offer to help clean you up. Another person then picks your pocket while you are distracted.

Pickpockets target many of us because we stand out and look like we have money. Be aware of your surroundings and your belongings at all times. If you know you are going to a particularly touristy spot, leave as much at home as you can. The RSO wants you to have a safe and enjoyable tour in Madagascar. Please call our office with any questions or concerns.

